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# The Furman influence

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# The Furman influence

*During her Founders Week address April 9, Karen Foreman '84 spoke on how she became involved with Habitat for Humanity International, which she serves as an organizational development and governance specialist. She spoke specifically of three events at Furman that influenced her career choices, starting with Collegiate Educational Service Corps.*



**Karen Foreman '84 is currently based in Brazil with Habitat for Humanity International.**

**A**t Furman it's almost an assumption that students will be involved in the community through CESC. The value of service and giving back to the community is instilled, expected and facilitated. What other university turns its campus into a playground on May Day Play Day? What other university maintains a fleet of cars and vans for students to drive to their volunteer work?

Through CESC I met Paula, a 14-year-old middle school student who needed a tutor. Soon after we met, Paula told me she wouldn't be coming to school anymore. She was pregnant and had decided to leave school. I continued to visit Paula and her family throughout my four years at Furman. Sometimes I think I learned more about life, the cycle of poverty and teen pregnancy in that family's kitchen than anywhere else.

I also took two courses that still influence me greatly: a sophomore honors course with professors Charles Alford (economics and business), James Edwards (philosophy) and Duncan McArthur (English); and foreign study in England and Belgium with professors Willard Pate (English), Donald Aiesi (political science) and Richard Stanford (economics and business). Although the subject matter was important and interesting, it was the culture and processes of these courses that made the difference. They offered extended time with professors and included interaction between them and between students. Both teams of professors provided environments of mutual respect and spirited inquiry. They treated us as students and as colleagues.

Obviously, these professors knew their subjects. But the manner in which they taught provided us opportunities to feel that we not only took away knowledge but also contributed knowledge for the other students and for them. They provided examples of confidence in learning from others, and of insatiable intellectual curiosity.

The third influence: At Furman I was introduced to Habitat for Humanity.

Chaplain Jim Pitts knew Millard Fuller, the founder and president of Habitat for Humanity International. In fact, Fuller had spoken at Furman

in 1980, long before anyone had heard of Habitat. Dr. Pitts maintained contact with Fuller, and during spring break in 1984, associate chaplain Vic Greene led a student group to Habitat headquarters in Americus, Ga. A friend of mine, Brian Warford '84, went on the trip and was so impressed that he decided to volunteer at Habitat after graduation. I visited Brian in Americus — and got hooked.

But the Furman/Habitat story goes deeper. Not many people know that the spiritual foundation of Habitat comes from Millard Fuller's experiences at Koinonia Farms, a Christian community outside of Americus. Koinonia was founded in 1942 as a "demonstration plot for the kingdom of God." There, people sought to have their lives and work demonstrate the love and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Over the years, people at Koinonia have done some wild things — at least, wild to the local community at the time. Things such as farming with respect for the land, or walking up to doors of white churches with African-Americans and being blocked at the steps by church elders with shotguns. Wild things . . . like eating lunch together, white folks and black folks, or starting a catalogue business for their products because the Klan had blown up their roadside stand — twice. And starting something called Partnership Housing, which eventually became Habitat for Humanity International.

Koinonia was founded by two couples, Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin and Mabel England. It turns out that Martin England was a graduate of Furman.

I love that Furman participated in the spiritual, intellectual and emotional formation of this man who, with his wife, was willing to join the Jordans and put their lives and faith on the line. The Jordans lived out their lives at Koinonia; Martin and Mabel eventually left to become missionaries in India. I'm sure Martin had no idea that his participation in the formation of a Christian community farm in a tiny town in southwest Georgia could someday spawn another organization that would build homes for more than 100,000 families around the world.